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ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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Interviewers

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9 Dec 1974
(date)

Interviewee

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Nov. 9, 1974
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PEARCE: This is an interview with Will County Coroner, Willard Blood, for the Joliet Junior College Oral History Program, by Bob Pearce, at the Will County Coroner's office, on December 9, 1974, at 4:00 p.m.

PEARCE: First of all, Mr. Blood, could you tell me where and when you were born?

BLOOD: Yes, Bob; I was born in Joliet, Illinois, on January 9, 1906. It will soon be my birthday.

PEARCE: Where did your parents live at that time?

BLOOD: My parents lived in Joliet, Illinois; and, if I can recall, I think it was on Second Avenue on the corner of Meda and Second, where I was born in Joliet.

PEARCE: Is this where you were raised most of your life?

BLOOD: No, my parents never owned any property; they rented most of their lifetime, but they worked. We moved and lived in various parts of the city of Joliet. In fact, I remember I went to several different schools in the city of Joliet.

PEARCE: What kind of work did your father do when you were a child?

BLOOD: Well, my dad was what we call "a streetcar man." He was a conductor and motorman for the old Chicago and Joliet city lines for years when they had streetcars here. I remem-

ber them very well; and I used to, when I was a small child, take his dinner to him on the streetcar.

PEARCE: Did you ride the streetcar often with your father?

BLOOD: Not too often. If I had some place to go, we would go by streetcar. We never owned an automobile until I was old enough to buy one. In my early childhood, I remember, frequently we would take trips into Chicago. Maybe we would go to a ball game and go by streetcar because it was a pretty long ride.

PEARCE: How much did it cost to ride a streetcar at that time?

BLOOD: Well, in those days -- believe it or not -- the fare was just a nickel. You could get on a streetcar at one end of town and ride downtown and get a transfer and go to the other end of town, all for five cents.

PEARCE: Now the streetcar -- is this the same as a trolley?

BLOOD: This is a trolley car, yes, same as a trolley car. Electric-motored streetcars.

PEARCE: How many children were in your family, Mr. Blood?

BLOOD: Just two. I have a younger brother; his name is Harry, and he was five years younger than I.

PEARCE: Did you go through the Joliet school system?

BLOOD: Yes, I went through the Joliet school system. I got out of grade school in 1920, and then I went to the Joliet Township High School from 1920-1924. Then I got out of high school in 1924 and entered the mortuary field at that time.

PEARCE: As a child can you remember any of your chores that you may have had around the house?

BLOOD: Oh, I think like any child I had the customary requirement of doing dishes once in a while and cleaning up the house and keeping it clean and things of that nature. Although, when I was about fourteen or fifteen and still going to school, I worked for my uncle, a general contractor, from time to time and learned the use of tools. He was a carpenter-contractor, and I kind of enjoyed that.

PEARCE: Were there many things for children to do in Joliet when you were a child, Mr. Blood?

BLOOD: There were not the organized things as we have this day and age for the younger children, such as baseball leagues and basketball leagues. There was no Y. M. C. A. per se in those days, but we found our own amusement. We had our own baseball teams; we had our own basketball teams and our neighborhood groups. We seemed to keep ourselves fully amused all the time, and we had a lot of fun doing it.

PEARCE: How about the parks in Joliet when you were a child?

BLOOD: Parks in those days-- well, there were some parks; but

one I remember the most, of course, would be Highland Park, which was at the east part of our city, which later became Pilcher Park with the addition of all the forests out there. At this park they had ice skating in the winter time. We also had West Park which was open. We had ice skating there in the winter time, and it was a nice picnic area. Then, of course, in near-by towns like Plainfield there was Electric Park and the parks along the I & M Canal, place to place.

PEARCE: How about Dellwood Park?

BLOOD: Dellwood Park was in operation in those days. I recall because of the fact that my dad would always run the streetcars on extra, what they call "trippers" on Saturdays and Sundays when they had big gatherings out there. We would use the streetcars, and I would frequently go to those gatherings for amusement.

PEARCE: Are you married at this time, Mr. Blood?

BLOOD: Yes, I married rather, shall we say, late in life. I was thirty-five years of age when I married, and this was just prior to my having gone into military service. We have two daughters and five grandchildren.

PEARCE: What were some of your earliest jobs, Mr. Blood?

BLOOD: Well, one of my earliest jobs was when I just got out of high school, and I had been studying to become an electrical engineer, and I wasn't sure if I could make it.

I couldn't be a doctor because of the fact that the depression years kind of put the quietus on us, I guess. I took a job as a crane operator in a place where they picked up stones and moved them from place to place to have the men down below chisel out headstones and things of this nature. I was the operator of the crane which would pick these stones up and move them from place to place for the workmen down below. It didn't last very long, however, because of the fact that about the fifth or sixth day I worked at this job one of those stones slipped off of the sling that it was being carried on and narrowly missed two workmen down below; and that kind of scared me, and I gave that job up. In the meantime, while I was going to high school, I was working for a mortuary firm. By that, I mean I would work there nights. I would help them when they had ambulance calls; I would help them make pick-ups; I would help them with the embalming; and I washed, drove, and greased cars and took care of things of that nature for this mortuary firm all while I was going to high school. So when I came out of high school, I took a full-time job there, more or less. Then I went to mortuary college and became licensed as a funeral director and embalmer. So you might say that that's about the only work I've ever done. I've been in the mortuary field all my lifetime.

PEARCE: Do you remember any of the other early funeral directors in Joliet?

BLOOD: Yes, I recall many of the old-time funeral directors



in Joliet. I worked for the firm of Chamberlin and Sloan; that was about the oldest firm in the area at this time. They established themselves in 1851 in Lockport and moved to Joliet in 1881. The firm was known as Chamberlin and Son in those days, and then it was changed when I went to work there in about 1924 to Chamberlin and Sloan. Chamberlin was the old family name that was established in Lockport in those years by the grandfather of the man for whom I worked. So you might say that this firm is about the oldest firm in the county. The other older firms in the county at that time were the (when I was working) Wunderlich & Harris, Sonntag; J.T. O'Neil came a little bit later. There was a firm for whom Mr. Dames worked, and he later branched out by himself. Then there were some old-timers in the county towns like George B. Luce in Plainfield. Mr. Luce was a funeral director and one of the old-timers; he and my grandfather at one time operated a stage between Plainfield and Joliet. H.B. McCann operated the Western Funeral Parlor. I can't recall some of the other old-timers in Joliet, but there were quite a number of them.

PEARCE: Do you remember any stories or have remembrances that may have been passed on to you by earlier funeral directors?

BLOOD: No, funeral directors are a strange sort. They all have their pet stories they tell from time to time as to what happened on a certain instance; but I don't think I can relate, truthfully, some of the things that did happen to some of these individuals.

PEARCE: Have there been many changes in the funeral business in the last fifty years?

BLOOD: Yes, there's been tremendous changes because of the fact that in the old days, if you recall, when someone would pass away, they would be in the home or in a farm home; and the funeral director would be called to the farm home or to the home to embalm and prepare the body. Then the family would go to the mortuary to pick out and select their merchandise and casket, etc. Then the funeral director would go back to the home and bring the merchandise there and dress the body and place it in the casket and conduct the funeral from the home to the cemetery, or from the home to the church to the cemetery. In those days a mortuary, (as we know it in this day and age as a funeral home) was not in effect because all the funeral director had was a place to store his caskets and maybe prepare bodies. So it's quite a change from those days until now.

PEARCE: What were some of the earlier hearses like when you started in the funeral business?

BLOOD: The firm for which I worked, Bob, bought the first motorized hearse in the county in 1914. This was a Pierce-Arrow automobile with a big body on it enclosed in the back; and it was used as a combination hearse and ambulance. The front was covered, but the sides were open. If you accompanied anybody inside this car as a helper, it wasn't conducive to good riding because being all closed in you would more or

less get seasick in the thing. Following that, there were other people with funeral homes who put in motorized equipment; but that was the first one in the County of Will. I remember that particularly because it was in 1914 they did it; and I was just a kid, and I remember going over and looking at it because we lived in the general vicinity of this funeral home.

PEARCE: Do you remember any of the early horse-drawn hearses?

BLOOD: No, that was just a little bit before my time. I remember them vaguely, as seeing the funeral processions with the hacks and horse-drawn carriages. I saw many of them as a child up until I was about 10 or 13 years of age. Then they kind of phased out after 1914 when this motorized equipment came into being.

PEARCE: When you first started in the funeral business, were most of the cemeteries on the outskirts of Joliet?

BLOOD: Yes, the established cemeteries at that time, when I started in the business . . . Elmhurst was just a new cemetery -- it had only been open a very short time. The old, established cemeteries were the Oakwood Cemetery on East Cass Street, the Mount Olivet Cemetery, which is adjacent thereto, and the Lutheran Cemetery which was just on the west end of the Oakwood Cemetery. That, and the country cemeteries in the nearby surrounding area were about the only ones in operation. Saint Patrick's Cemetery, which is located on top of Jefferson Street hill, was in

operation at the time; but other than that, there weren't too many cemeteries.

PEARCE: How were the roads getting to some of these cemeteries?

BLOOD: The roads within the city and in the town itself were not bad; but many of these country cemeteries had gravel roads to them, and then sometimes the lane into the cemetery would be black dirt and earth, and very difficult to traverse. They kept the cemeteries up very well and tried to keep the entranceways all clear, especially in the winter time. They would sometimes need extra plowing and moving of snow with some of those bad winds we used to have.

PEARCE: I know the cost of funerals has gone up greatly in the last fifty years. Can you recall what the cost of funerals was in the 1920's?

BLOOD: In the twenties, when I first started while going to high school, I recall I lost my grandparents in those years. I know what costs were relative to the complete funeral service, and a very fine funeral would not cost much more than about \$250. I've seen some old-time bills from time to time that have been produced by different people. Some burials and some funeral services during the years of 1924 to 1930, the prices were not as they are today, because all it cost to open a grave in a cemetery in those days was usually \$10 or perhaps a tip to the gravedigger or to the person in charge of the cemetery. There was no actual standard fee,

but usually the cost of opening a grave and closing a grave was about \$10 or \$20 in the country cemeteries. It's a far cry from this day and age because it now costs \$200 to open a grave in a local cemetery after you own the grave.

PEARCE: Can you recall the most elaborate funeral you were ever at?

BLOOD: The most elaborate? You mean cost-wise, people attending it, organizations, etc.? No, I can't specifically recall any particular case; but I do remember and recall in the early '20's that many organizations would attend the funeral of a person who was well-known. If they were a member of the patriotic organizations, they would all attend; if they were a member of the fraternal organizations, they would all attend. Many times they would have funerals in the Masonic Temple instead of at home when they were a Mason; or instead of a church, they would have them in the Masonic Temple. Other than that, I don't recall anything really different from the usual routines.

PEARCE: How about funerals for the poor?

BLOOD: Well, in those days, we had what was called a "county home." There were quite a few residents in this county home; and when they would die, there were no provisions to take care of them except what the county would pay. I think the fee the county would allow for the complete burial and service for this individual was \$35. They would furnish the grave, which

would be located in some of their back property. They would have some of the help out there -- some of their residents -- open the grave; and the funeral director would go out and take a casket and place the body in the casket and put it in the grave. They would have their own service in these localities. This is what was done on the "poor farm" for those people who were out there. People who didn't have any funds and had no way of paying for what they required would make application to the county for county burial. They would allow the same fee of \$35 for the complete funeral service.

PEARCE: Can you recall any mass burials in the city of Joliet?

BLOOD: No mass burials, per se. The only occasion to have a reason to have a mass burial would be when there has been some kind of a disaster and lots of bodies; and, perhaps, parts of bodies that have not been identified would have to be disposed of by burial.

PEARCE: In your years in the funeral business have you ever had any very unusual requests? From a family, say, after a death. . . or even before a death?

BLOOD: Well, in this day and age of prearrangements people do come in and tell you what they desire to have done, which we record and place on record so when they do pass away, we do try to do what they have requested us to do. Among these things, sometimes, are requests for cremation, having the ashes scattered on the lake or scattered from the air, or disposed of in some unusual manner.

PEARCE: Can you recall any county cemeteries or old cemeteries that are no longer in use but still exist?

BLOOD: I can't recall them by name, Bob; but for a time after World War II, I was grave registration officer for the Harwood Post, American Legion. I had a list of cemeteries in the county, and we found that there was probably a great number of them that had not been used in many, many years. There might have been some Civil War burials on them; there might have been some World War I burials on them, too. Most of those cemeteries are closed or they're not in use, but they're still recorded as regular cemeteries even though they're not being used at this day and age.

PEARCE: How about the cemetery at Route 30 and Cherry Hill Road that is behind Higgenbotham's farm?

BLOOD: That's known as Mound Cemetery, and Mound Cemetery was an old-time cemetery -- there was some old burials in there. It's still a legitimate cemetery because it's owned by, that is graves in there are owned by, some people who are still living and perhaps someday may possibly use these graves. Even though it is not supervised by a person, the records are kept by an individual of the family. There are many graves in there; and from year to year sometimes it looks a little bit deteriorated, but from time to time it's cleaned up by the neighbors and persons who have formerly owned graves in there or have someone in there.

PEARCE: Before we go too far here, Mr. Blood, do you recall

when the canal was put in through the city of Joliet?

BLOOD: No, that again was before my time.

PEARCE: Do you remember the bridges being put over the canal?

BLOOD: Do you mean the current bridges that we have now -- our lift bridges?

PEARCE: Yes.

BLOOD: Yes, I recall that. I recall the digging, of course, of the Illinois Deep Waterway, not the canal. The Illinois and Michigan Canal, of course, was years ago; but the Deep Waterway was put in when I was a young man. I recall having many friends who worked on it from time to time. I watched the construction of it very diligently; I knew what was going on. I watched how the sewer systems from the east side were put in and directed down along the east wall. In fact, I had occasion to take a trip one time from the general vicinity of approximately Ohio Street in the sewer system all the way down to where it comes out of the wall at Brandon Pool. That's probably about a distance of maybe three or four miles.

PEARCE: You mean you actually walked underground through the sewage system?

BLOOD: Walked underground through the sewage system as it was being built at this time, yes. It was quite an engineering feat.

PEARCE: How large was the sewer system?

BLOOD: When work began, it was probably a four-foot sewer. Then it got larger as you approached over towards Cass Street to Michigan Avenue; it got to be about six foot. As it progressed to below from Clinton Street down to and below the viaduct and over into Osgood Street and South Chicago Street, it was about an eight-foot depth. Then it progressed at an angle toward the wall, the east wall, of the Illinois Deep Waterway, and entered into the base of the east wall. There it was about almost twelve-foot. It was quite a large area.

PEARCE: I never even knew that existed. Getting back a little bit to your childhood, do you remember when the old icemen and milkmen would come around in their horse-drawn carts, wagons?

BLOOD: Sure, I think any kid in those days would remember the iceman in particular because we would always hop on the back of his wagon and steal a piece of ice, or we would ask him for a piece. Most usually he'd give it to us -- he'd take a piece off and give it to us. Yes, I recall those days very vividly.

PEARCE: I know you were too young to have been in World War I; was your father in World War I?

BLOOD: No, I was in World War II. My father was not in military service. No, he was of the age that had just been married and had children and was not summoned into the service because he was probably over the age for World War I.

PEARCE: Right after you started in the funeral business, the depression started. Can you tell me any experiences that may-be happened to you during the depression?

BLOOD: Well, I was very fortunate, Bob, during the depression. As I said, my dad and mother never owned any property; we rented it. My brother and I lived with my mother and dad. When I started in the mortuary business, I was about 18 years of age; and I took this job full-time after getting out of high school. This was, of course, in the depression years; and I had a job. I didn't make a lot of money, though. I made enough to pay my way and help my mother and dad. I have never been out of work. I applied myself to the work and finally became licensed in the mortuary field and able to earn more money in this field. Then, of course, after I was licensed, I was appointed a deputy coroner under the late Doctor E. A. Kingston, who was then coroner.

PEARCE: How was the funeral business during the depression? I would imagine there weren't too many people who had very much money to pay for funerals.

BLOOD: Well, it seems that most of the people who made arrangements had some kind of funds to get by with. Many people in those days did have a little life insurance, and this is about all they did have. I don't recall any particular hardship of any particular families that couldn't pay their bills. They wouldn't buy as much as they would like to because they didn't have the funds, but they would have a nice service; and they

would do what was proper and respectful and do the best they could under the circumstances. None of the funeral directors were ever hard on anybody, because if they didn't have the money, they always took care of them and buried them if they were their clients.

PEARCE: You say you served in World War II. What branch of the service were you in, Mr. Blood?

BLOOD: Bob, I was summoned by my neighbors to serve in World War II. I went in early into the service. I was inducted on April 22, 1941, and served nine months in the infantry. I was released in November of that year for being over age (35 years of age). They let the old guys out. Then on December 7 you recall the bombing of Pearl Harbor and our entry into the war subsequently thereto. I was a fully-trained soldier, and they summoned me right back to where I was within about two weeks time after the war broke out with Japan. I went back to the same organization in the infantry and was assigned to a medical installation. From there I went to O.T.S., Officers' Training School, where I was commissioned to second lieutenant in December of 1942, or I'm sorry, December of 1943. I was assigned as Detachment Commander of the station hospital, or a general hospital -- Nichols General Hospital in Louisville, Kentucky. I had lived there approximately a year and a half. I was sent overseas to Italy from there as a replacement officer and took over the 32nd hospital in Caserta, Italy. I spent a year and a half overseas; and

when the war was over, I returned to Joliet and back to my work, where I had formerly worked, at the Chamberlin Mortuary. They had lost both partners of the business; therefore, they were in the process of closing up their business, so I joined them for a six-months period to really close out their business. I purchased lots of their equipment and held it in storage until the first day of January, 1947, when I entered into partnership with Harry W. Grant in the operation of the Blood and Grant Funeral Home which was located at 112 Richards Street in Joliet. We have since moved to the new location at 3201 West Jefferson Street. We now call it the Blood and Grant Westwood Memorial Chapel with Mr. Harry W. and Harry C. Grant as partners. In 1948 I ran for the Office of Coroner; and before that time, from the time I worked with the Chamberlin firm until I went overseas, I was a deputy coroner. Then after having returned, I ran for the office and was elected in 1948; and I have been the duly-elected coroner since that time.

PEARCE: What are some of your main duties as Coroner of Will County?

BLOOD: The main and principle duties of coroner is to determine the cause and manner of death of all people who die by accident, homicide, suicide, or undue means. This is the coroner's responsibility to determine the cause and manner of death. This is done in a couple of ways. First off, by making a preliminary investigation as to the circumstances

of death, then categorizing it into either accident, homicide, or suicide, and then conducting an inquest into the death of the individual before a jury, a coroner's jury of six persons. At the inquest the jurors are sworn to inquire as how, when, where, and in what manner the body came to its death. The witnesses are interrogated by the coroner. You must remember the coroner is not a judge; he merely brings out from the witness the circumstances of what happened to the individual. Testifying, of course, would be a member of the family to make identification. We would use witnesses who saw what actually occurred, and then you would use the police source to indicated what their investigation revealed relative to the circumstances of death. This is all taken down in shorthand by a court reporter and made into a transcript. Transcripts become a record in my office for the use of attorneys in case of a cause of action, for proofs of death, etc. The verdict of the jury is filed in my office and also filed with the clerk of the circuit court. The witnesses are all duly sworn, and they are testifying while under oath.

PEARCE: When is it necessary to call for an autopsy?

BLOOD: This is another way of ascertaining the exact cause of death. It is necessary to perform an autopsy in all cases of homicide. This is to prove out that the person was, in effect, killed by somebody. You have to determine the actual cause of death. Also, the autopsy will indicate the length and depth of the stab wound. It may be necessary to recover a bullet

that might still be in the body of the person who is deceased. This information is correlated with the technical investigation of the police and is used if there is a trial for the accused, in which the States' Attorney must have this information to make a proper prosecution.

PEARCE: Do you remember any strange incidents that you may have come across while being Coroner of Will County?

BLOOD: Oh, I have many, many, many of them! Strange things happen all the time. I remember one strange thing, and I don't want to mention any names; but the minute I start talking about it, people will recognize. I was home one Sunday morning. I got a call from a personal friend who was a police captain in the City of Joliet; and he said to me, "Come out to a certain address on a certain street; there is a body here that is to go to a certain funeral home, and it's a suicide." So I leisurely dressed and went out to this address where this captain told me to go, and I went to the back and went inside, and there was a police officer inside, and I said to him, "Where is the captain who called me?", and he pointed (he was kind of excited) and he pointed and stuttered, pointed to the floor, and the captain was lying on the floor with a hole in his head and one in his chest. It was unusual for a man to commit suicide by shooting himself twice; but this is exactly what happened because in reconstructing the thing, he had shot himself in his right temple; and the bullet went through and struck the ceiling and

dropped down behind the stove where we recovered it. He probably came to and realized he was still alive, and he placed the gun to his chest, and he fired it through his chest, and the bullet went through and lodged in the floor where we recovered it. Both of them matched up the gun, and if it hadn't been for the fact, perhaps, that he had called me prior to this time and I talked to him and recognized his voice, maybe they wouldn't believe that he had done this to himself, which I thought was most unusual.

PEARCE: Yes, I'll agree. Very unusual. How about some other strange incidents?

BLOOD: Well, we get into strange ones, and we get into some that are sometimes humorous. A humorous one I recall is that one time I went out to the east-side jungles to make an investigation into a death of a tall, gaunt, black man, who had apparently died from a pulmonary hemorrhage caused by tuberculosis. He had a companion with him, who was mumbling to himself; and he was saying, "Who's this man, the coroner, I have to wait for?"; he says, "I tell the railroad company the man's dead, and they say call the sheriff, and the sheriff says call the coroner. Now who's this fellow, the coroner, I have to wait for?" While he was mumbling this, I overheard him -- I was writing the description of the fellow who was deceased; then I stooped over and emptied his pockets out to gather more information and identification of the man. With this, the fellow and his companion says, "Oh, I know who the

coroner is now, he's the fellow who gets the first shake-down!"

Another strange incident, if you want more: Recently, maybe a couple of years ago, I received a call about 3 o'clock in the morning to go to the E.J. & E. yards in Joliet, where there had been an accident, and a man had apparently fallen from the top of boxcar. I was on my way out there, and it was shortly after the opening of Richards Street under I-80; and I came down through there about 3 o'clock in the morning. It was dark -- there was no lights -- and I saw an automobile on its side up against the bridge on Hickory Creek. There was nobody around it, so I stopped, backed up, and put my lights on it and went and looked in the car. I could barely get in the car to look in there, but I could see a form in it. I couldn't do anything by myself. I have a two-way radio in my car hooked up to the sheriff's department, so I called the department and told them to notify the City to come and bring a wrecker and an ambulance, that there was a man injured, and that I would be at the Silver Cross Hospital. So I proceeded on to the hospital to make this investigation of the fellow they brought in from the "J". When I got there, they brought this boy in that was in the back of the car that I found, and he was deceased. Just about as I was going to go into the hallway, I noticed in the emergency room, there was another young man in there, who was dazed by injuries and by liquor. I was going to help the nurse with him, and I got to talking to him and asked him what happened. He said he didn't know, but he was in an automobile accident someplace around Second Avenue. What apparently had happened was that he had walked

away from this incident that I found on the way down for the hospital, and some passing motorist had picked him up and brought him into the hospital; but through him, I learned who this person was, who had no identification on him. They had both been out drinking and celebrating the birth of a newborn baby of this fellow who was instantly killed in the automobile accident.

PEARCE: Could you tell me, Mr. Blood, when the coroner's position first came into effect in Illinois?

BLOOD: Yes, but first I'll give you a little history of the office, Bob. The coroner is the holder of an office originally in the service of the English Crown, and this was established in the twelfth century. He was, and still is, the highest civil officer in each county. In both the United States and England he can perform executive duties in case of absence or disablement of the sheriff. The original duty of this office, and this is back to the twelfth century, was to keep the Pleas of the Crown, that is, to keep a record of all criminal matters that arose in the county, principally with the view to securing to the King his proper, fine, and dues. They also find coroners in England hearing appeals of a felony, sentencing felons who are caught red-handed in some kind of a deal. They even preside in jury trials in civil causes. The most important function and the only one that has substantially survived to the present day came to be the holding (along with the jury) of inquests over bodies of persons who have

by violence, or in a sudden or unaccountable manner, or in prison or lunatic asylum, or under certain circumstances which render publicity desirable in order to avoid suspicion of foul play. In England the verdict of a coroner's jury accusing anyone of homicide is sufficient to bring that person before an indictment. This is not so in the United States; you have to be indicted in the United States before you can go before a jury for a trial. So we find that the office of coroner is an ancient one at common law, and the powers and duties of coroners in England were clarified by the statutes in the year of 1194, in the twelfth century. Now the first act in the General Assembly of Illinois regarding the duties of the coroner was passed on March 2, 1819. The present act in relation to coroners is contained in the Illinois revised statutes. Chapter 31 was originally enacted in 1874 after the adoption of our Constitution, which was in 1870. This is substantially the same as the English statute, except the principle duty now is to determine the cause and manner of death. New legislation that was signed into law in 1957 was a certain senate bill, which modernized the law pertaining to the coroner. I take exceptional pride in having had a part in the preparation of this bill, first as a member of the legislative committee in its preparation, and then as a president of the Illinois Coroners' Association when it was presented and became a law. The only thing the bill did was -- in fact, it was jointly prepared and sponsored by the Illinois State Medical Society and

the Illinois Coroners' Association. Both organizations felt that for sometime the laws relating to the coroner ought to be brought up to date; it kind of needed modernizing, and this is what was accomplished. The key provision was that this new amendment brought about a better determination of the cause of death, and it gave the coroner the power and the right to perform autopsies in the cases where heretofore we had no right to do. In Illinois autopsies are conducted under the jurisdiction of the coroner's law; and they are always performed by a licensed physician and, whenever possible, by a pathologist. On my staff I have pathologists who are located in both hospitals and also an individual who will go out to the various funeral homes and perform autopsies for me. So you see, this is the integration of the medical system with the coroner's system. The coroner's responsible for determining the cause and manner of death, and he has to hire and pay the pathologist for the work that he does.

PEARCE: Do you remember the name of the coroner you succeeded in the County of Will?

BLOOD: The coroner was Doctor E. A. Kingston. In fact, I was his deputy from 1929 until 1937. In 1937 there was a change in national administration; and Doctor Kingston, who ran for office again, was defeated. A Democrat beat him in 1937 until 1940, and in 1940 Doctor Kingston ran again, and he became the coroner again after a four-year interval. Then he appointed me as his Chief Deputy Coroner in 1940. It was

following that in 1941 that I went into military service. So when I returned from the service, I didn't have my job as Chief Deputy Coroner, so I went into business for myself; and I ran for office, as I stated before, in 1948. I have been the coroner since that time. To give you an idea, Bob, of the power and duties as prescribed by the statutes -- the principle ones, as I stated before, is to investigate and determine the cause of the death under unknown or unusual circumstances and those that occur without medical attendance. The coroner is also empowered to summon six persons, called The Coroner's Jury, who assist in this investigation. That's called the Inquest. The coroner has the right to order autopsies, if necessary. He has the power to arrest and hold for trial those criminally implicated into death. He has the requirement to sign all death certificates under his jurisdiction, and to see that the bodies of indigents, that are under inquest, are properly and decently buried. He has the power to make arrests in his line of duty in office and to act in place of the sheriff if for some reason the sheriff fails to act. Those are the principle duties of the office of coroner.

PEARCE: During your fifty years in the funeral business and as Will County Coroner for the last twenty-six years, are there any changes that you would like to have made?

BLOOD: Bob, I feel very proud of the changes that I have caused to be accomplished with this office, especially in

modernizing the law to incorporate the medical system into our system. Every year there is always an attempt by the American Medical Society to change the coroner's system to a medical system. The medical system is all right, except that I am afraid that it would be very expensive to a county to put it into operation. You would have to have a forensic pathologist at the head of it. He would need assistance -- clerks, typists, and laymen. He would have to have a place to do business, like a morgue with office space. At the present time I utilize hospitals and the mortuaries and funeral homes; and throughout the county I have deputies who are morticians, who, at no cost to the county, would make removals and handle bodies. If they get the funeral, of course, they are compensated; but, if not, it is no cost to the county for the deputies. I was just comparing what it would cost the county to operate a medical system, compared to a coroner's system. If you get into specifics, moneywise, why my budget this year is a little over \$50,000, which includes court reporting, full-time clerk and Chief Deputy. Pathology is performed by the pathologist that I order and hire. Fees are paid for hospital usage for morgues and X-ray technicians, etc., and transportation from time to time. Compared to what it would cost if it was under the system of a medical examiner, I am afraid that a medical system would cost many times more than my yearly appropriation.

PEARCE: I think that should cover about everything. Thank

you, Mr. Blood; it has been a very interesting and informative interview.

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